Freedom Watch™
Citizens Project

Kweisi Mfume Promotes "New" Civil Rights Movement

by Donna Ladd

The man who is trying to invigorate the civil rights movement in this country brought his in-your-face message to town March 6.

NAACP President and CEO Kweisi Mfume pulled no punches while in the Springs for his organization's regional conference. He pledged to fight any attacks on affirmative action, called for an end to voucher legislation, and told NAACP delegates to take responsibility for their economic well-being and the actions of their children.

Mfume's words reverberated in the Antlers Doubletree Hotel, giving anyone listening something to think about.

He told white people: "I hope ... you will understand the indignity of those who are not (white) ... and you in your own way will become just as indignant" about racism.

He told black people: "Those of you who happen to be African American ... must at some point in time get beyond blame, beyond excuses and once again start doing for ourselves."

He told other races: "Those of you labeled Latino, Asian, or Native American must understand the real need to build coalitions one way or another, even when some in your number and some in mine choose to look another way."

'We can have both'

"The NAACP recognizes that colored people come in all colors," Mfume said upon his arrival. While heralding his forebears' work for racial equality in this country – basic things like pulling up a stool to a lunch counter – Mfume said the "new NAACP" must move to the next level.

> *[Mfume's] goals are: civil rights for all, economic empowerment, educational excellence, voter empowerment, youth outreach and now health care.*

"I believe in my heart of hearts that economic empowerment is that next frontier," Mfume said. He added, however, that some people would erode the first round of victories – such as affirmative action – if they're left unchecked. Thus, the NAACP must keep its eye on basic civil rights as it moves its membership to the economic frontier.

"We can have both," he said. "The traditional civil rights efforts have not lost their place. Picketing and demonstrating are still important, but we're smart enough to evolve."

The grassroots efforts of the NAACP's past must continue, Mfume said, to ensure that victories won't be reversed as the community becomes complacent about the civil-rights movement. One way to get support from the ground up is to engage in community dialogues such as President Clinton's Dialogue on Race Relations initiative and the locally sponsored Community Conversation on Race that will take place in Colorado Springs this fall.

In an interview, Mfume applauded the Springs's efforts to bring its disparate elements to the same table. "Community dialogue is helpful because it forces people to talk to one another. They can then come to grips with their own misconceptions and stereotypes," he said.

As a result, people fix things themselves rather than rely so heavily on the government, churches, and other support groups. "They leave believing, 'I must do more.' The power is with the individual," Mfume said.

Such dialogues show people that they want the same things, he added. "They want good education, a good health-care system, and to know that their streets are safe." In community dialogues, people often get their emotions out of the way quickly, Mfume said. Then they can get on with the real work.

"An even playing field"

Mfume's six-point plan – he added a new one while in the

Continued on page 2

Vouchers Would Devastate Our Country's Urban Schools

by Congresswoman Maxine Waters

The American public school system is responsible for the education of approximately 90% of our nation's children. Therefore, the last thing this country can afford to do is to divert scarce resources from our already hurting public schools to fund private school education. That is what would happen under school "voucher" plans supported by many leading Republicans and other conservatives.

As states experience budgetary crises, we must decide and act on meaningful reforms that will enable our educational system to better respond to the needs of our young people. "Choice" is not a reform–it is an abandonment of American children and teachers who rely on our public system for education and job opportunities. Contrary to claims, the school choice proposal will be devastating for urban, minority, and poor students who desperately need quality education.

Private schools are not governed by federal, state, or community public policies. While some might wield this fact to support expanding choice to include private schools, such a move will simply amount to an open season on the hard-won civil rights gains our country has made in the last 30 years. Private schools, for instance, are free to discriminate – they may accept anyone by their own choosing, and you can be sure that those who will be rejected will be those students who require higher-cost services such as special or remedial education.

The widely acclaimed Americans with Disability Act, civil rights legislation, and laws governing the use of defamatory materials have no bearing on the functioning of private schools; and if students should misbehave, fail to perform adequately, or simply not fit the mold, no uniform standards shall regulate how their cases will be handled – opening the floodgates for preferential treatment.

Our taxpayers' money should not be used to support privately owned, elite academies. Neither should taxpayers support sectarian institutions or religious schools, as prohibited by our constitutional mandate separating church and state.

Tragically, at a time when our children need and deserve serious, thoughtful, and dramatic change, the best that "choice" advocates can do is offer a smoke screen that diverts national attention and resources from our nation's poorest and "at-risk" students. CP

Maxine Waters, a congresswoman from Los Angeles, is a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and of the House Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee.

Citizens Project
P.O. Box 2085
Colorado Springs, CO 80901

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Colo. Spgs., CO
Permit No. 463

Mfume, Continued

Springs – calls for: civil rights for all, economic empowerment, educational excellence, voter empowerment, youth outreach, and now health care.

Many have dissected Mfume's comprehensive plan in order to further their own agendas, championing some of his points while ignoring others.

For instance, Mfume's economic-empowerment message calls for minorities to focus on their bottom line, to form coalitions with financial institutions to improve their communities, and to succeed in the business world.

A March 10 Gazette editorial applauded Mfume's pro-business, pro-responsibility message. Yet, the same editorial derided affirmative action as "the wrong way for the civil rights movement to advance." These words missed much of Mfume's point – that affirmative action is still a vital link to enabling economic empowerment for minority communities. The playing field is still too bumpy, he said."

> *"We're not asking to be given anything except an equal opportunity to compete."*

Affirmative action is being attacked, dismantled, and redefined on all fronts ...," he said in his keynote. "Those who seek to do the redefining fail quite frankly to understand the mission and application of affirmative action ... and why it's still one of the better things for American society."

Mfume called for affirmative action programs to continue in order to create "an even playing field for women and minorities in this country."

"We're not asking to be given anything except an equal opportunity to compete," he said.

Adults: Do your part

Mfume's "educational excellence" message was similar. He called for the African-American community to educate and mentor its youth. "We need our branches and our volunteers to start again believing in young people," he told the delegates. To that end, adults must pay attention to kids rather than writing them off, even in the face of overwhelming problems in the young black community.

"Many young people want to be asked, to be given real tasks, to be held accountable, to know somebody loves them," Mfume said. To that end, under his direction, the NAACP has stepped up its campaign to bring young people into the fold. The group is now taking their message to young venues such as Black Entertainment Television, Video Jukebox and hip-hop conventions.

Yet, he emphasized, the minority community can't fix its youths' problems without equal access to education – a need that vouchers would quickly erode.

"The NAACP believes public tax dollars should not be used in private institutions ...," Mfume said before the keynote. "In the process, you deny opportunities to other people." He added that vouchers can assist only a "finite number of young people" and shouldn't be used as "passports to a better education." Instead, "let's make the public school system better with those public dollars," he urged.

A healthy movement

In addition to education and money, Mfume added health care to the NAACP's list of priorities. "You can't carry a picket sign, can't raise a little hell, argue your point, or make a case if you can't stand up, can't speak, if you're ill. It has everything to do with civil rights," he said.

He pointed to the falling life expectancy of black men – now at 64 – as one reason to promote prevention and treatment of cancer, heart disease, hypertension, stroke, and HIV in minority communities.

"You're paying Social Security thinking you're going to collect at 65. You have no agenda if you don't have your health," he said.

The civil-rights agenda must now be America's agenda, Mfume said. He pointed to the pioneers of the movement who knew that all forms of intolerance are wrong.

"They knew that black bigotry is just as cruel and evil as white bigotry," Mfume said, adding that his forebears found gay-bashing, union-bashing, and any other human-bashing unacceptable.

"They knew what Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai was not the '10 suggestions,' but rather a blueprint for life," Mfume said. CP

Donna Ladd is a free-lance writer in Colorado Springs. E-mail her at donna@shutup101.com.

Citizens Project

Colorado Evaluates First Reading-Assessment Tests and Results

by Cassie Armstrong

The results are in from Colorado's first statewide reading assessment test. One question remains unanswered, though: What do this test and its results mean for Colorado students and schools?

Last spring, 52,000 fourth-grade public school students in Colorado took a test which compared their abilities to the new state standards for reading and writing. Last year's test established "baseline scores" for student achievement before statewide standards were initiated, against which subsequent assessments can be compared, said Jan Noble, president of the Colorado Springs Education Association.

> *Unlike most standardized tests, which are multiple choice, the CSAP requires students to respond to questions by writing a sentence or paragraph.*

Educators applaud the test as a step in the right direction. "If we think of the top of the mountain as being the 'world-class standards' for what our kids need to know and be able to do, then the new standards-based tests will tell us where our kids are on that mountain and, most importantly, what our schools need to do to get them to the top," said William Moloney, Colorado Commissioner of Education, in the *Rocky Mountain News*.

> *Bacon sees CSAP results as "a good way for districts to evaluate their schools and provide more resources for schools requiring the most help."*

However, Tom Tancredo of the Golden-based Independence Institute, a conservative think tank and a voucher proponent, predicted in *The Denver Post*, that "the scores will precipitate much hand-wringing but little lasting change."

Educators in Colorado Springs believe differently. They believe the test signals the beginning of an accurate assessment of elementary students in our public school system and will truly assess how much individual students improve. "It's a good place to start," said Jan Noble.

The Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) test provides a picture for schools and districts in two areas: school progress in raising achievement, and district success in aligning curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment with the state's model, said Bill Veitch, Director of Assessment for District 11.

As a result of the baseline tests, "teachers and districts are now creating a curriculum, going to classes, and participating in various other instructional inservices statewide, not necessarily in Colorado Springs, to learn how to get our kids to measure up to the tough standards the CSAP presents," Noble said.

Unlike most standardized tests, which are multiple choice, the CSAP requires students to respond to questions by writing a sentence or paragraph. Students also write a story and analyze poetry.

"Instead of using only a computer to score the tests, readers also were hired by the state to read and individually score each student's test, providing more accurate feedback," said Peg Bacon, professor of education at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, and chair of Citizens Project's Board of Directors.

In analyzing test results, Bacon added, it is important to remember that test results reflect the student body as much as they reflect a school's success. "They confirm something we already know; people in higher-income areas score better on tests.

"We need to keep in mind that the scores were designed to show how well kids achieved in their particular school according to statewide standards," she said. "Socio-economically, there is a very clear correlation between how well the students performed on the tests, with the socio-economic status of their parents."

Does that mean we merely accept the poor test scores from the students and schools that didn't achieve as well those in wealthier areas of town? Bacon doesn't think so. "In District 11, Hunt and Adams [elementary schools] have been restructured to increase achievement by lowering class size and providing additional support," she said. Bacon sees CSAP results as "a good way for districts to evaluate their schools and provide more resources for schools requiring the most help."

The movement for better standards provides a way for Colorado to get back to basics in education and is supported by the governor, legislators, and citizens throughout the state. "The tests and Colorado's new standards tell the truth about our schools and hold everyone (adults and students alike) accountable for what goes on in them," Moloney said. CP

CSAP Results

The state CSAP results showed 57 percent of the fourth graders were advanced or proficient in reading; 31 percent were proficient or advanced in writing. Seven local school districts performed above the statewide average: Academy District 20, Cheyenne Mountain 12, Manitou Springs 14, Widefield 3, Woodland Park Re-2, Lewis Palmer 38, and Miami-Yoder 60JT.

Colorado Coalition Defends Afirmative Action

Editorial by
Soyun Park and Bill Vandenberg

Affirmative-action civil rights programs (one of the most enduring legacies of the civil rights movement) are front and center among the radical right's national attacks on diverse communities. Groups such as Americans for Tax Reform and the misleadingly named American Civil Rights Coalition are leading a national effort to dismantle fair, effective, and necessary affirmative action programs that increase access to a level playing field for women and people of color in contracting, education, and employment.

Supporters of civil rights in Colorado and around the nation have reason to be deeply troubled about the attacks on programs and policies designed to combat the US's legacy of discrimination.

A profound symbol of this struggle occurred in September 1997 when the US commemorated the 40th anniversary of the integration of Little Rock, Arkansas's Central High School. Also in September 1997, University of California at Berkeley's prestigious Boalt Hall Law School began its first school year following the passage of anti-affirmative action Proposition 209. Dramatic pictures of the nine African-American students being escorted by the National Guard into Central High School in 1957 contrast sharply with the *one* African-American student entering Berkeley's Law School (a 95% decrease from the previous year). These images speak volumes about the effect of dismantling affirmative action programs and the direction that civil rights programs appear to be heading.

Thanks in part to election-year politics, no direct attack has yet surfaced on affirmative-action civil rights programs in the 1998 Colorado General Assembly. Apparently because of this year's gubernatorial election, Republican leadership has discouraged anti-affirmative action forces from running "divisive" social legislation. Such legislation often leads to a higher voter turnout from students and communities of color, which could affect gubernatorial election outcomes. Indeed, the recent backlash in California by the Latino community against conservatives has given Colorado affirmative action opponents reason to pause.

Civil rights advocates remain concerned, however, that affirmative action opponents will introduce at least one bill in the state legislature or attempt to file a last-minute ballot initiative.

Despite efforts to focus on the race for the Governor's seat, one legislator supportive of affirmative action has relayed that research is being conducted in order to introduce anti-affirmative action legislation in the coming weeks. At the General Assembly, "late bill" legislation can still be drafted and introduced. If affirmative action opponents do not introduce legislation or a ballot initiative this year, they will likely increase their efforts in 1999 and 2000, particularly if the political affiliation of Colorado's governor changes.

Colorado Unity, a coalition that formed to promote and defend affirmative action, has been organizing since 1996 to unite diverse communities – business, labor, civil rights, women, religious, students, and others – to challenge attacks on affirmative action programs. Colorado Unity now counts over 30 member organizations and includes defeating anti-affirmative action legislation in 1997 as its most significant victory to date.

Colorado Unity has begun a statewide educational and organizing campaign designed to dispel misconceptions about affirmative action programs and to build a strong grass roots voice across the state to respond to attacks. Colorado Unity will be working with many Pikes Peak-area groups and individuals to build a strong local coalition of affirmative action supporters.

Get involved! Pikes Peak-area groups will be organizing an educational community forum on affirmative action in the next few weeks. The forum is tentatively scheduled for late April. For more information, or to join this important effort, call Colorado Unity at 303-866-0908 or e-mail sopark39@juno.com. CP

Soyun Park and Bill Vandenberg are organizers for the Colorado Progressive Coalition – a statewide social and economic justice organization based in Denver – and are among the founders of the Colorado Unity affirmative action coalition.

Pikes Peak Human Relations Corner

Over the last several months, the Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition has been restructuring and attempting to clarify its role in the community with regard to advancing positive human relations. Several new members join us in this effort. They are: Arleigh Champ-Gibson, Denise Cohen, Bill Lyons, Judy Slason, and Sid Snyder.

The PPHRC hopes to devote more energy to holding local government bodies accountable for the human relations climate in this region and ensuring that they devote sufficient resources to human relations issues. In this regard, the PPHRC applauds the city council for passing the anti-discrimination resolution last May and for defeating Councilman Dawson Hubert's attempt to weaken the resolution.

Councilman Hubert's proposed change would have made the resolution less clear. And passing it would have made it appear that the council was only pretending to take a stand, while rendering the resolution ineffectual. Ambiguity, which might be necessary sometimes in order to reach a compromise, should be avoided when the discussion revolves around fundamental rights.

A community must hear its leaders speaking out on the side of equal treatment for all people. City government has an obligation to identify its philosophy with regard to human rights, outlining additionally what it sees as its role to promote positive human relations.

We hope the Council's action (or, in this case, inaction) signals increased willingness to stand up against forces that hope to divide the city.

Newsbriefs

Council Stands by Zero Tolerance Resolution

On Tuesday, March 10, City Council member Dawson Hubert tried to alter the city's Zero Tolerance for Discrimination Resolution. Council passed the resolution unanimously last May soon after many of them were elected. The move was most likely an effort to set the tone for their administration.

Colorado for Family Values, realizing the resolution might also protect gay and lesbian city employees from discrimination, convinced Hubert to challenge the resolution's wording. Hubert had hoped to change the phrase: " ... Council will have zero tolerance for any form of discrimination of a racial, ethnic, sexual or religious nature" by removing all the qualifying categories.

Although Hubert had a number of weeks to drum up support for his proposed change, not one Council member would second his motion to reconsider the language, never mind consider specific changes.

In standing by their Zero Tolerance for Discrimination Resolution, Council signaled another defeat for Colorado for Family Values. They also added to the signs that Colorado Springs is moving beyond the divisive days of Amendment 2. Our thanks to Citizens Project Activist Network members and others who contacted Council members.

Scholarship Group Adds to School Choices

In an attempt to "give the students a choice, and ... give the school district a kick in the pants," a pro-voucher group has offered scholarships to almost every student in a low-achieving school. A Better Choice started a program in Albany, N.Y. last summer to supplement the cost of private and religious schools for students currently attending Giffen Memorial Elementary School. ABC chose Giffen because the school's test scores were the lowest in the district.

Any Giffen student accepted at a private school, with the exception of incoming pre-kindergartners, is eligible for a scholarship. Scholarships cover 90 percent of the cost of private school tuition or $2,000, whichever is less. Most students taking advantage of the offer attend local Roman Catholic elementary schools where tuition runs $1,000 to $1,800 a year.

After only one semester, ABC is claiming success. Of the 458 eligible students, ABC says 105 have taken advantage of the scholarship offer, while the district says 77. Regardless of the numbers, major changes have occurred at Giffen.

The struggling school has gained a new principal, two other top administrators, and a dozen replacement teachers. The new principal initiated staff workshops on teaching methods, a mentoring program for new educators, a telephone hot line for help with homework, recruitment of more parent volunteers, and a renewed emphasis on student discipline. The school board also voted to give Giffen $125,000 more than the district's funding formula called for.

Giffen Principal, Maxine Fantroy-Ford said the school's overhaul "probably would have happened [without the ABC program], but it might have happened slower." Test scores are not yet available to determine whether the ABC program has fostered improved student achievement at either public or private schools.

ABC organizers say their program proves vouchers improve public schools by forcing them to compete. However, ABC provided privately funded scholarships rather than tax-payer-funded vouchers.

Local NAACP branch president Ann Pope articulated this difference. "Public schools should be held accountable," Pope said. "But I don't think we should be giving public funds to private schools. That would just be a siphoning of funds."

News Briefs continued on page 4

Citizens Project

Newsbriefs, Continued

ACLU Objects to Profanity Law

An obscure Colorado Springs ordinance banning profanity in city parks is under attack by the American Civil Liberties Union. The law states that it is unlawful for "anyone to engage in loud, boisterous, abusive or indecent language which may tend to disturb the peace in any park." The ACLU points out that profanities are a form of free expression protected by the First Amendment.

Former city attorney Jim Colvin said the law was probably written in the 1920s and was never removed from the books. The law lay dormant for years prior to two reported violations in 1996. It was then enforced over 14 times in 1997.

The profanity ordinance joins several recent incidents in Colorado Springs that caught the attention of the ACLU. The organization has also looked into a gag rule placed on firefighters regarding Fire Station 3, police department citations of homeless people based on nonexistent ordinances, and the 6-year-old "Lemon Drop Kid," the student suspended from school for bringing organic lemon drops in his lunch.

Back-Door Voucher Bill in US Senate

The latest attempt at subsidizing private religious schools with public funds has surfaced in the US Senate. The Finance Committee recently approved Senate Bill 1133, which allows people to contribute up to $2,000 per year into tax-free, interest-generating "educational savings accounts." Money could be saved in these accounts for expenses such as tuition, homeschooling supplies, and school athletics.

Senators Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., and Robert Torricelli, D-N.J., co-authored the bill, which they claim will aid approximately 10.8 million families with children now in public schools.

The bill's opponents, led by Education Secretary Richard W. Riley, counter that the bill will do little to aid low-income families, and is a disguised tax break for the affluent. Riley points out that a family with a $25,000 income who saves $200 would receive only a $2.50 tax break from the proposed legislation.

"The bill disproportionately benefits the most affluent families and provides little benefit to lower- and middle-income families," wrote Riley and Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin in a letter to the Senate Finance Committee. They are urging the president to veto the bill.

Some of the bill's supporters say low income families could invest enough if they made sacrifices (like cutting back on cigarettes. According to Rep. John Ensign, R-Nev, "Most poor people who don't seem to be able to save money–a lot of them smoke."

Similar tax credit proposals are surfacing locally. Colorado voucher proponents have altered their ballot initiative strategy, changing their proposed amendment from a direct government subsidy for private schools to an indirect subsidy in the form of a tax refund. If their ballot initiative passes as worded, every parent that sends a child to private school would be eligible for a refund as high as $2,500. The cost of such an amendment could be at least $1.2 million. Because education is one of the state's largest expenditures, this dramatic drop in revenue would inevitably affect financial support for local schools.

Racial Healing for Our Future

Assets for Colorado Youth, an organization promoting 40 developmental building blocks that kids need to succeed, will host a workshop for kids and parents on Asset #34: Cultural Competence. Assets urges young people to have knowledge of and a comfort level with people of different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Join the state Director of Assets for this free workshop from 3:30-5:00 p.m. Friday, April 17th at the First United Methodist Church, 420 N. Nevada. CP

Town Meeting II
The Forgotten Government

El Paso County Dept of Health and Environment ..... Board of County Commissioners ..... Elected Officals (Assessor, Clerk & Recorder, Coroner, DA, Sheriff, Surveyor)

WHAT DO THE DOTTED LINES MEAN?

Panelists: Mary Brown
Director, Intergovernmental Relations: Colorado Dept. Public Health & Environment
Robert S. Lorch Ph.D.
Professor Political Science, CU-Springs; Author of *Colorado Government*
Steven Englender, M.D.
Director, El Paso County Dept. of Health & Environment
Harvey Vieth, DDS
El Paso County Dept.t of Health & Education Board Member, Fmr County Commissioner
Moderator: Mr. George Fellows
For Colorado Springs City Manager Additional Info: Call 576-5299

Sat., April 4, 1998 9:30-11:30 am • Hillside Center, corner of Institute & Fountain

Sponsored by the Committee for Responsible County Government

Co-Sponsors: Citizens Project, Colorado Springs Osteopathic Foundation, El Paso County Medical Society, Ground Zero, League of Women Voters, Urban League of the Pikes Peak Region

Celebrate Diversity!

Citizens Project • Box 2085 • Colorado Springs, Colorado 80901 • 719-520-9899

Our Mission: Citizens Project is a grassroots organization in the Pikes Peak region dedicated to upholding the traditional American values of pluralism, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state.

You can make a difference

JOIN
Citizens Project

Your voice for tolerance in the Pikes Peak region.

Citizens Project ...

- Organizes campaigns, workshops, and events
- Sponsors candidate surveys and forums
- Monitors and informs on legislative and other issues
- Reports on news and views in *Freedom Watch*

... and more

☐ Yes, I'd like to join Citizens Project! Enclosed is my membership contribution of $25 or more.

☐ I'm already a member, but I'm ready to do more! Enclosed is my contribution of:

☐ $25 ☐ $50 ☐ $75 ☐ $120 ☐ Other: $_____

(All members receive a postage-paid subscription to Freedom Watch.*)*

Name_____

Address _____ (Street)

_____ (City) (State) (Zip)

Phone (___) ___ – (___) ___ – (Work) (Home)

Please return to:
Citizens Project
Box 2085
Colo. Spgs., CO 80901

Citizens Project

P.O. Box 2085
Colorado Springs,
Colorado 80901

Phone: (719) 520-9899
Fax: (719) 520-0118
WWW: citproj.ppages.com

Editorial Committee

Michael Dyer, Sharon Friedman, Richard Van Scotter, Greg Walta, Mike Miles

Board of Directors

Peg Bacon, Chair; Jody Alyn; Christine Beserra; Pastor Jesse Brown, Jr.; Lynda Dickson; Amy Divine; Sharon Friedman; Mike Miles; Joanne Peterson; Richard Van Scotter; Richard Skorman; Marie Sullivan; Greg Walta; Marjory Webster

Director

Megan Day

An affiliate of Community Shares.
***Freedom Watch* is a monthly publication of Citizens Project.**
©1998, Citizens Project. All rights reserved.

Thanks to 3RI Web- and Copy-editing!

GILL FOUNDATION

Freedom Watch is sponsored in part by the Gill Foundation, a Colorado Springs-based foundation that shares and embraces the values of Citizens Project.

Freedom Watch also receives support from the Chinook Fund, a foundation dedicated to supporting grassroots community organizing and social change in Colorado.